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Müller, Martin

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# Situating Identities: Enacting and Studying Europe at a Russian Elite University

Martin Müller

The majority of studies on identity in the discipline of International Relations have analysed identities from an analytical perspective of distance; they elide the fact that identities are situated productions which unfold in specific contexts and through different forms of signification. In this article, I seek to work towards greater attentiveness to the situatedness of identities. I propose a reconsideration of the concept of discourse for situating identities and argue that ethnography can be a useful methodology for analysing the discursive construction of identities in micro-settings. This conceptual argument is illustrated by drawing on data from ethnographic research within Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), a Russian elite university. I analyse how identification with Europe shifts across multiple contexts as it is enacted in everyday life and represented in the multiple processes of studying international relations at this educational institution. Foregrounding the situatedness of identities in this way brings their ambiguities and instabilities into view, while cautioning against an all-too-easy universalization in identity research.

Keywords: discourse, ethnography, Europe, identity, poststructuralism, Russia

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## Introduction: Identities from a Distance

In the past two decades identity has become a key concept in international relations research. For many scholars it is centrally implicated in the principal foci of the discipline: security, international cooperation, institutions and many others. Initially largely confined to the study of nationalism and ethnicity, the concept of identity has quickly acquired wider relevance

across the field of International Relations (IR). Among other things, it has inspired research on the construction of security,<sup>1</sup> international conflict,<sup>2</sup> foreign policy choice,<sup>3</sup> the construction of borders<sup>4</sup> and the emergence of institutional practices.<sup>5</sup> Identities are now so firmly installed on the agenda of IR that it is hard to imagine the discipline without this concept.

It is particularly in thinking about Russia that scholars have eagerly embraced the identity concept.<sup>6</sup> Although more than 15 years have elapsed since the end of the USSR, the question of Russia's (inter)national or geopolitical identity seems to be as topical and open today as it was in the early 1990s. Russia's inconsistent foreign policy and the imputed 'identity crisis' after the collapse of the Soviet Union almost invited the application of identity research. Societal dislocation in post-Soviet Russia has opened an identificatory gap which needs to be filled by new imaginations of Russia's role and place in international politics and by a new sense of belonging – in short, by a new identity.<sup>7</sup>

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I would like to thank lecturers and students at MGIMO for so openly sharing their lives and their views with me for this research project.

1. For example David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

2. For example Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006); Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

3. For example Rodney Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

4. For example Ulrike H. Meinhof, ed., *Living (with) Border: Identity Discourses on East–West Borders in Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

5. Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

6. There are a sizeable number of articles and several monographs on this topic, e.g. James H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Mikhail A. Molchanov, *Political Culture and National Identity in Russian–Ukrainian Relations* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2002); Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996); Rolf Peter, *Russland im neuen Europa: Nationale Identität und außenpolitische Präferenzen (1992–2004)* [Russia in the New Europe: National Identity and Foreign Policy Preferences (1992–2004)] (Hamburg: LIT-Verlag, 2006); Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Pathways after Empire: National Identity and Foreign Economic Policy in the Post-Soviet World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

7. Graham Smith, *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition* (London: Arnold, 1999), 47–50; Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe, and Žižek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 152.

For all the popularity of the concept of identity, I would like to suggest that the engagement with it – both in IR at large and in the specific case of Russia – has led to an analytical perspective of distance in a double sense: distance through the focus on privileged textual representations at the expense of social practice and distance through the all-too-easy decontextualization of identities from the cultural imprints and instability of the everyday.<sup>8</sup> As regards the first point, the majority of studies rely on a socio-linguistic concept of identity. They draw on codified textual representations such as speeches, government documents, political declarations, pamphlets, newspaper articles and geopolitical strategy papers. The focus on textual representations, however, disregards the fact that states are composed of people and their social practices ‘who cannot and should not be reduced to the images which are constructed by the state, the media or of any other groups who wish to represent them’.<sup>9</sup> As for the second point, analyses typically focus on identities as an outcome and their impacts on processes at the international level, leaving little room for the contextualization of the production of identities. This focus overlooks the fact that identities are ‘socially created in specific social circumstances’<sup>10</sup> and that, consequently, ‘the process of identification is of as much interest to us as identity itself’.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the traditional analytical perspective all but elides the situatedness of identity production. By situatedness I specifically mean here the context-specific articulation of different subject positions through different forms of signification. Recognizing the situatedness of identities implies addressing not only that identity production takes place in specific locales, but also that identities are necessarily ‘contingent and precarious...and dependent on specific forms of identification’.<sup>12</sup> Highlighting situatedness therefore inevitably means highlighting the context of the production of identities as well as the shifting nature of identity that arises from these ‘specific forms of identification’. Underlying this study is therefore an

8. Similar cases are made in Nick Megoran, ‘For Ethnography in Political Geography: Experiencing and Re-imagining Ferghana Valley Boundary Closures’, *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 622–40; Iver B. Neumann, ‘Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 627–51.

9. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan, ‘Nation, State and Identity at International Borders’, in *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*, eds Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–30, 4.

10. Neil Renwick, ‘Re-reading Europe’s Identities’, in *Identities in International Relations*, eds Jill Krause and Neil Renwick (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 154–71, 155 quoting Sharon Macdonald, ‘Identity Complexes in Western Europe: Social Anthropological Perspectives’, in *Inside European Identities*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 1–26, 6.

11. *Ibid.*, 155.

12. Chantal Mouffe, ‘Citizenship and Identity’, *October* 61, Summer (1992): 28–32.

understanding of the construction of identities as not being the exclusive domain of intellectuals of statecraft at the centres of state power or in high politics, but as taking place just as much in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

In this article I seek to explicitly situate the processes of identification and thus to address the aforementioned shortcomings by looking at the specific case of identification with Europe in Russia in a micro-setting. I will do so in two moves. The first is conceptual and aims to develop a concept of discursively constituted identities that is able to capture and contextualize different forms of meaning creation in identity construction. The second is empirical and attempts to fashion an analysis of identity construction that is attentive to the situatedness of identities. For this purpose I draw on illustrative data from nine months of ethnographic field research at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), the premier university for training and education in diplomacy and International Relations in the post-Soviet space. I examine how the articulation of Europe at MGIMO takes place in two different contexts and through two distinct forms of signification: first, in the practices of how students go about their everyday lives and, second, in the representations of students and instructors in the process of studying, i.e. learning and teaching about Europe. On the empirical side, therefore, this article seeks to chart the multiple ideas and shapes of Europe at MGIMO, while conceptually, in employing this case study, it intends to bring the situatedness of identities and their articulations into view.

## Conceptualizing Situated Identities

A concept of situated identities must be able to account for two central aspects of situatedness. First, it must be able to capture different forms of signification, i.e. linguistic as well as non-linguistic forms of meaning construction. Second, it must integrate the role of context for the formation of identities. Employing an appropriate concept of discourse and understanding identities as discursively constituted can be helpful in this respect. In the wake of the linguistic turn, the concept of discourse has come to represent the interest in the connection between language and the social. Questions of how the world comes into being through language and how subjects are constituted within it are of central concern to discourse theorists.<sup>13</sup> Conceptualizing identities as discursively constructed has thus typically meant looking at texts from which these identities can be inferred.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Jennifer Milliken, 'The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods', *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 225–54.

14. See the seminal book by James Der Derian and Michael Shapiro, eds, *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington,

Thinking of identities as purely linguistic phenomena, however, ignores the fact that social practices also play a central role in their constitution.<sup>15</sup> By social practice, I specifically mean the doing of identities, the performative recitation of discourses, in micro-contexts. This privileging of textual representations has led authors to demand that text-based analysis be supplemented by the inclusion of practice.<sup>16</sup>

Ideas taken from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe may prove useful for extending the concept of discourse so as to encompass the domain of social practice as an important form of signification.<sup>17</sup> Laclau and Mouffe do not reduce discourse to the linguistic element but explicitly include social practice as a form of meaning creation and fixation.<sup>18</sup> What people do and how they make sense of their everyday lives as local social practice are just as much an expression of discourse as is the production of foreign policy documents. The degree to which these two forms of signification are intertwined becomes obvious in the study of border identities: the local lives of people at the border are inextricably wedded to the vicissitudes of foreign policy decisions at the national and international level.<sup>19</sup> Fundamental to the ensuing analysis of situated identities is therefore a conceptualization of discourse as both language *and* social practice. In my specific case, this implies looking not only at the fixation of identities through representations from the formal process of studying Europe but also at non-linguistic means of meaning creation through everyday practice, through enactment.

The concern with social practice almost inevitably calls for a focus on the second aspect of situatedness: contextuality. Studying context often means studying social practice. By context I specifically refer to the institutional

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MA: Lexington Books, 1989), and in the Russian context, e.g. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*; Sergei Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: The Limits of Integration* (London: Palgrave, 2006); and Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

15. On this see the argument in Martin Müller, 'Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse in the Field of Critical Geopolitics: Towards Discourse as Language and Practice', *Political Geography* 27, no. 3 (2008): 322–38 and David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 24ff., who draws on the work of Judith Butler.

16. For example Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', although I do not agree with his way of opposing the two concepts of discourse and practice, and meaning and materiality.

17. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985).

18. For more detail see Müller, 'Reconsidering the Concept of Discourse'.

19. For example in Nick Megoran, 'The Critical Geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary Dispute, 1999–2000', *Political Geography* 23, no. 6 (2004): 731–64.



context in which everyday interactions take place. The integration of context, the contextuality of social phenomena, has been highlighted as one of the distinctive features in the analysis of discourses.<sup>20</sup> Anything that is not explicitly expressed in the data corpus yet manifests its traces and is considered necessary as an interpretive frame for understanding the meaning fixations that occur in discourses must be treated as relevant context:

Discourse should preferably be studied as a constitutive part of its local, global, social and cultural contexts ... [C]ontext structures need to be observed and analysed in detail ... : settings, participants and their communicative and social roles, goals, relevant social knowledge, norms and values, institutional or organizational structures, and so on.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of context distinguishes discourse analysis from methods of text analysis such as content analysis. Ted Hopf underscores the fact that in the constructivist analysis of international relations 'all data must be "contextualized", that is, they must be related to, and situated within, the social environment in which they were gathered, in order to understand their meaning'.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of discourse as it has been developed in this section is able to capture both different forms of signification and the role of contextuality. But how does it link up with identity? For Laclau and Mouffe, the identity of subjects is equal to the identification with subject positions, i.e. different possibilities of the meaning of a subject constructed within discourses.<sup>23</sup> Identity is characterized by contingency, i.e. a given identity is one of many identities, a possible but not a necessary outcome.

The social agent is constructed by a diversity of discourses among which there is no necessary relation but a constant movement of over-determination and displacement. The 'identity' of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of 'subject positions' and dependent on specific forms of identification.<sup>24</sup>

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20. Johannes Angermüller, 'Diskursanalyse: Strömungen, Tendenzen, Perspektiven. Eine Einführung [Discourse Analysis: Strands, Tendencies, Perspectives. An Introduction]', in *Diskursanalyse: Theorien, Methoden, Anwendungen*, eds Johannes Angermüller, Katharina Bunzmann and Martin Nonhoff (Hamburg: Argument, 2001), 7–22; Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994); Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis: In Search of Meaning* (London: Sage, 2000), 27–8.

21. Teun A. van Dijk, 'The Study of Discourse', in *Discourse as Structure and Process*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (London: Sage, 1997), 1–34, 29.

22. Ted Hopf, 'The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory', *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 171–200, 182.

23. Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

24. Mouffe, 'Citizenship and Identity', 28.



Being attuned to the situatedness of identities constructed discursively in this way urges both a change of perspective and a change of data collection methods in identity research. A change of perspective because studies of social practice and contextuality often involve the participation of the researcher in the situations they are analysing. This makes it more difficult 'to lapse into the almost superhuman view of scholarship that seems to emerge when we engage with systems, states, sovereignties, and so on as more or less disembodied structures, even abstractions'.<sup>25</sup> And a change of data collection methods because largely text-based studies of global politics must be complemented 'by different kinds of contextual data from the field, data that may illuminate how foreign policy and global politics are experienced as lived practices'.<sup>26</sup> Fieldwork is thus a crucial component in putting flesh on the bones of the concept of situated identities.

## Why Europe?

Europe is arguably a central signifier in Russian identification: 'Russian identity is caught up in the relationship with Europe', as Neumann put it.<sup>27</sup> Defining what it means to be Russian through establishing differences and equivalences vis-a-vis Europe is a recurrent trope in articulations of Russian identity. Perhaps due to the centrality of the European signifier, the meaning of Europe in Russia has also been particularly contested and ambivalent:

For Russia, Europe was always both charming and frightening, appealing and repulsive, radiating light and darkness. Russia was anxious to absorb Europe's vitality – and to ward off its contaminating effects; to become a fully fledged member of the European family of nations – and to remain removed from it; to become an object of its courtesies and even its devotion – but at the same time to inspire fear and trepidation. Indeed, the whole history of Russia is cast in this contradictory feeling.<sup>28</sup>

The boundaries between such different identities are not fixed and impermeable: they change over time and in different situations. This applies all the more to highly contested identities, as in the case of Russia's geopolitical orientation.<sup>29</sup> Several authors have argued in favour of the continued significance of Europe for Russian identification either as a cultural and spiritual referent, without Russia wishing to become a part of institu-

25. Didier Bigo and R. B. J. Walker, 'International, Political, Sociology', *International Political Sociology* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–5, 5.

26. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 628.

27. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 2.

28. Vladimir Baranovsky, 'Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?', *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2000): 443–58, 445.

29. See also Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, *Putin's Russia and the Enlarged Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing with the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2006).

tional Europe,<sup>30</sup> or as an agent granting recognition of Russia's European identity.<sup>31</sup> Others detect an increasing alienation from Europe and attenuation of the European signifier in Russian foreign policy discourses. Prozorov, for example, highlights political currents which advocate 'getting over Europe' and excluding it completely from the constitution of Russian identity.<sup>32</sup> Thus it is sought simply to remove the question of Europe from the political agenda. Other accounts observe the formation of a Russian great power identity, frequently with a geopolitical orientation towards Eurasia, and address Russia and Europe as increasingly separate, perhaps even hostile, entities in world politics.<sup>33</sup>

Europe is thus ascribed a range of different meanings in different discourses in Russia, whereby its immediate spatial, geographical denotation has been replaced by intrinsically political concepts.<sup>34</sup> Europe is articulated to give meaning to and unify such diverse and contested concepts as, for example, Russia's civilizational and cultural belonging, Russian international security, societal orientation or economic prosperity. But Europe also has an everyday meaning in Russia in which it is linked to ideas of what constitutes a good life. This idea of Europe is closely tied to the colloquial use of concepts such as 'Evro-Remont' in the Russian language in which Europe is associated with notions such as superior quality and cultured consumption.<sup>35</sup>

In the terms of Laclau and Mouffe, Europe serves as an empty signifier in Russian identity construction – a signifier with universalizing effects but no specific signified. Empty signifiers play a central role in the constitution of identities: by unifying a heterogeneous social field around a

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30. Nikolas K. Gvosdev, 'Russia: European but Not Western?', *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 129–40; Vyacheslav Morozov, 'Auf der Suche nach Europa: Der politische Diskurs in Russland [In Search of Europe: Political Discourse in Russia]', *Osteuropa* 53, no. 9–10 (2003): 1501–14.

31. Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, 'Russia's Relations with the European Union: A Constructivist Cut', *International Politics* 39 (2002): 399–421.

32. Sergei Prozorov, 'The Narratives of Exclusion and Self-exclusion in the Russian Conflict Discourse on EU–Russian Relations', *Political Geography* 26, no. 3 (2007): 309–29, 323ff.

33. For example Robert Kagan, 'New Europe, Old Russia', *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2008, A19; Jeffrey Mankoff, 'Russia and the West: Taking the Longer View', *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 125–35; Boris Mezhuiev, 'Modern Russia and Postmodern Europe', *Russia in Global Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2008).

34. This aspect is studied by political geographers in the field of critical geopolitics, see, for example, the instructive overview by Simon Dalby, 'Critical Geopolitics: Discourse, Difference and Dissent', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 9 (1991): 261–83.

35. For this function of 'Europe' in everyday life see, for example, Jennifer Patco, 'Consuming the West but Becoming Third World: Food Imports and the Experience of Russianness', *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 21, no. 1 (2003) <http://condor.depaul.edu/%7Errorotenbe/aeer/V21n1/Patco.pdf>, 10 July 2008.

discursive centre, they fix its meaning and give it its identity.<sup>36</sup> It follows that empty signifiers are universal containers of meaning which can be filled with varying content in different discourses. It is due to this central role of Europe as an empty signifier in Russian discourses that it has been chosen for analysis in this article.

## Becoming Contextualized

It is our mission to prepare highly capable elites – opinion leaders, business captains – who can serve as a role model and who will be of use for the Russian society and our state.<sup>37</sup>

The roots of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)<sup>38</sup> go back to 1944, the year it was founded by the USSR People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs as a response to the perceived need for an institution to train cadres for the Soviet diplomatic service. During much of the Soviet period MGIMO remained a closed institution in a double sense: admission was highly selective and the institute itself was shrouded in mystery and frequently an object of public lore. Much of this air of awe has remained to the present day, although MGIMO has undergone profound restructuring in the post-Soviet years, during which it has sought to become more transparent and considerably broadened its disciplinary scope beyond international relations. These changes notwithstanding, MGIMO's close connections to state authorities and the Russian Foreign Ministry are a key feature of the university, which still serves as the gateway to influential positions in Russian society and the Russian state. What is more important for this study, it continues to function as *the* place to study and teach International Relations in the post-Soviet space and acts as the main recruiting source for the Russian Foreign Ministry. Given its mission, the majority of the resources at MGIMO are channelled into teaching and training, with research being of lower priority.

Admission to MGIMO happens through two channels. About half of the students are admitted by merit through high performance in various academic competitions and contests. Competition for these places is tough, with about five applicants per place. Students admitted by merit are exempted from paying tuition fees and receive a small stipend. The other half of the students also have to pass an entrance exam but are only admitted if they are able to pay the tuition fees. In this entry channel the majority of applicants succeed in being admitted. Annual tuition fees are between US\$5000

36. See Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse*, or Ernesto Laclau, 'Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?', in *Emancipation(s)*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London: Verso, 1996), 36–46, for a good summary of the operation of empty signifiers.

37. Interview with Professor Igor' Rozhkov, available on [faces.mgimo.ru](http://faces.mgimo.ru).

38. MGIMO is the common acronym under which this university figures in Russia.

and 7500. This is about equivalent to the nominal GDP per capita in Russia.<sup>39</sup> About 60 per cent of the students are from Moscow, whereas only 40 per cent come from outside the Russian capital. From this, albeit brief, description it may have become clear that MGIMO significantly contributes to the education and formation of the future Russian elites. Students' social background as well as their future roles in Russian society need to be borne in mind for a better understanding of the analysis that follows.

I spent the academic year 2005/6 doing ethnographic research at MGIMO, attending a number of lectures and seminars which seemed relevant to my overall interest in geopolitical identities.<sup>40</sup> My research was supervised locally by a professor at MGIMO in order to ensure compliance with the tacit local codes governing primary research. During my time at MGIMO I kept a field diary, audiotaped lectures and, towards the end of my research period, conducted 39 semi-structured interviews with students in different departments at MGIMO. My accumulated audio material initially totalled more than 150 hours, which made necessary a pre-selection of material to be transcribed. The following analysis draws on two different data sources: observations and casual conversations recorded in my field diary are used for the analysis of everyday life, whereas the more formalized fixation of Europe in the educational process at MGIMO is reflected in 25 hours of transcribed material from lectures and seminars and 22 hours of transcribed material from interviews with students on Russian foreign policy and Russia's role in the world.

Ethnography is a particularly apt method for elucidating the context and practices of the situated production of identities, due to the partial immersion of the researchers in the life-worlds of their subjects and the aim of understanding the social field in their emic categories.<sup>41</sup> It presents an attempt at collapsing the analytical distance

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39. All data as of 2006.

40. The ethical implications of my research are addressed in greater detail in my doctoral thesis.

41. The methodology of political ethnography, situated at the intersection of the disciplines of political science, anthropology, sociology and geography, has gained some popularity lately. This is attested by a number of recently published and forthcoming edited volumes: Lauren Joseph, Matthew Mahler and Javier Auyero, eds, *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography* (New York: Springer, 2007); Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008 forthcoming); and the review articles Gianpaolo Baiocchi and Brian T. Connor, 'The Ethnos in the Polis: Political Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry', *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 1 (2008): 139–55; and Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, 'From the Inside out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37, no. 2 (2004): 267–71. In International Relations, ethnography is still a very marginal methodology, but see Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn'; Vincent Pouliot, '"Subjectivism": Toward a Constructivist Methodology', *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2007):

and decontextualization of the majority of studies on identity in the field of IR by 'letting the subjects speak' and recording 'identities as a-theoretically as possible'.<sup>42</sup> What is more, ethnographic research is well placed to analyse how subjects are positioned differently by different discourses and in different contexts. With its attention to 'the little things',<sup>43</sup> it is able to trace how multiple articulations of the signifier 'Europe' overlap at MGIMO. Doing ethnography involves not just a change in data collection methods, though. It also asks for greater sensitivity and reflexivity in the analysis and presentation of a kind of data which does not have the abstract quality of political speeches for example – it asks for a change of perspective.

In the remainder of the article I have followed the established practice of ethnographic analysis in adopting an inductive methodology.<sup>44</sup> The data were coded to generate preliminary 'sensitising concepts'<sup>45</sup> and recoded until a stable system of categories emerged. The qualitative data, by their very nature, cannot claim to be fully representative of the whole student and lecturer body at MGIMO. The verbatim excerpts presented in this article have been chosen to reflect what I have interpreted as the dominant themes in the material and are meant to represent typical cases to the extent that this is ever possible. Data triangulation was used wherever possible to enhance and check construct validity: observation data recorded in the field diary were compared against data from informal conversations with students, and data from semi-structured interviews were compared against lecture transcripts.

The research design was set up in order to minimize researcher influence and selection bias. When soliciting participation in the interviews, I did not introduce myself as a European and stated that I was interested in students' views of Russia's role and place in world politics. However, insofar as the interviews did not occur naturally, they inevitably reflect the influence of the interviewer to a much greater degree than the lectures. Moreover, and this applies both to the production and to the ensuing analysis of the material, my position as a

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350–84; and the discussion forum contributions in *International Political Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 89–93.

42. Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, 28.

43. Nigel Thrift, 'It's the Little Things', in *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought*, eds, Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson (London: Routledge, 2000), 380–7.

44. Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practices* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 174–232; Stefan Titscher, Michael Meyer, Ruth Wodak and Eva Vetter, *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis: In Search of Meaning* (London: Sage, 2000), 90–103.

45. Herbert Blumer, 'What Is Wrong with Social Theory?', *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 1 (1954): 3–10, 7.

German-European researcher is inevitably bound tightly into almost all stages of my research, making the articulations of Europe examined in this article not only an external object of inquiry but also my own. In the next section I will provide an account of how European-ness is enacted in everyday life at MGIMO, underlining the centrality of social practice in the formation of identities. The subsequent section will then draw on lectures and interviews and centres on the fixation of Europe in textual representations.

## Enacting Europe in Everyday Life

In many respects, Europe and European-ness constitute a central element in the everyday lives of students at MGIMO. Unlike at any other university in Russia I had attended before, I frequently had the feeling that I was not even in Russia. One of the things that contributed to this feeling was the students' ability to freely converse in English or German with me. Since it is mandatory for all students to learn at least two, and usually three, foreign languages, exposure to Europe is frequently mediated through one or more European languages. English, French, Spanish and German are among the most frequently used languages at MGIMO. Of all their preparations for university education, students spend by far the greatest share of their time on preparing for language classes. Besides the linguistic aspect of language teaching, classes also place an emphasis on introducing students to the culture and lifestyle of the countries in which the language is spoken. Learning French thus comprises extensive discussions of what it means to be a Frenchman/Frenchwoman, what life feels like in France and how France and the French think of themselves in a Europe that is growing ever closer together.

Given the intertwined character of language teaching and cultural initiation, it is hardly surprising that students identify with their languages and the countries attached to them. This makes for a very international atmosphere at MGIMO. A considerable number of the students go on holiday to European destinations, rather than choosing the package tours to Turkey or Egypt which have become popular in Russia. The university newspaper *Mezhdunarodnik* regularly advertises flights and holiday trips to cities such as Paris, Berlin and Milan. European countries are, by far, the most popular locations to spend a term abroad; the rigid course programme, however, often does not permit students to go abroad for a lengthy period of time. Students also attend language courses in European countries, which, like studying abroad, especially strengthen their attachment to Europe by giving them the chance to immerse themselves in the local way of life. On several occasions during informal conversations, and in the interviews, students approvingly referred to their first-hand European experience from language courses and how it had given

their lives a more European outlook. Lola,<sup>46</sup> an IR student in her fourth year, talked to me about her language course in Munich:

Lola: You are from Germany? That's great. I have been in Germany twice, this year and last year. I've got a lot of friends there. My language course has really set my mind on Germany.

Martin: Hey, great to hear that. Where did you do your course?

Lola: In Munich. The town is just so beautiful. I'm missing this kind of European lifestyle here in Russia. I will now try to go every summer and visit my friends there.<sup>47</sup>

Several students also reported that their stays in Europe had prompted them to look for jobs either in Europe or with European businesses and organizations in Russia. It is especially those students looking for jobs that are not directly in private business and therefore not primarily concerned with making money who find themselves more attracted to Europe and the European idea of what represents a worthwhile profession. Like many others, Dasha, a fourth year student of political science, commented negatively on the career prospects in the Russian Foreign Ministry:

A lot of students here have a negative attitude towards working at the Russian Foreign Ministry. I think that it won't be very pleasant working there, because the chances of moving up the hierarchy are low and the pay is dismal.

The world of work in Europe, by contrast, is imagined in approving terms. Students describe it as more friendly and open and less hierarchical than in Russia. The social esteem of many professions is higher than in Russia and therefore makes them more attractive to pursue in Europe. Working with European organizations embodies an alternative to the stifling, uncreative and undemanding work students expect in particular in the Russian state apparatus. Ivan describes his plans for the future this way:

That's why I think that the best option for me personally is to do a Master's degree in an economic field. I have chosen the Russian-Italian-French master. Half a year we will study in France, half a year in Italy and the last year here. Studying in France will allow me to improve my French. Studying in Italy will allow me to find some general friends and acquaintances, broaden my social contacts and look at what is going in Europe with my own eyes. Perhaps I will be lucky and get a job in Europe – at least for some time. Although I would not want to stay in Europe for all my life.

Many students underline that it would be hard for them to leave Russia forever, even if moving abroad is tempting in many respects. Rather, what they would like is a Europeanization of Russian society which would offer them more attractive conditions to work in, particularly in those jobs such as diplomacy, government, journalism and academia.

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46. All names changed.

47. All material has been translated from the Russian by the author.



Fashion and clothing style at MGIMO are perhaps the most immediately visible markers of Europeanness and also the ones students tend to be most conscious about. Especially in the post-socialist context, fashion choice has been shown to be closely connected to social identities.<sup>48</sup> It is not only wearing clothes with international labels or made by international designers that counts, but especially knowing the shades and differentiation of what is 'good style' – when to wear what, how to combine things, what is in, what is out. For Oksana, and for some others, there is even something like a 'European style':

What I associate with Europe? Well, whenever I go to Europe, what strikes me most is how people just dress differently. They have a much better taste, a better style. It is this European style that I like, you know ... Many here at the institute are inspired by this and bring home clothes from their trips abroad. They are much cheaper there.

While certainly not all students share this attitude towards clothing, it is nevertheless a prominent feature of university life which is well documented in the pages of the MGIMO student magazine *Majordom*. *Majordom* runs a regular 'style' section, which covers the latest trends in the world of fashion and publishes, among other things, photo shoots from European fashion shows. Students are shown trying on and posing with different accessories from new collections and discussing the design merits of different belt types. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of the advertisements in the magazine come from fashion companies, most of them of European origin. A sophisticated way of dressing and a knowledge of the minutiae of the latest fashions are thus frequently associated with a particular desirable lifestyle, which, for many, is closely linked to the idea of Europe and Europeanness.

Everyday life at MGIMO is thus characterized by a high degree of permeation with various facets of Europe. Beyond the significance of individual European states and bilateral ties, Europe has acquired the function of an overarching, structuring concept. Students at MGIMO are not only exposed to but actively perform everyday European practices that function as symbolic markers of Europeanness. Europeanness here means engaging in certain practices of consumption, consuming particular media, dressing in particular ways, going to particular places – in short, living a particular lifestyle. Identification with Europe signifies a certain distinctiveness, a civilized, desirable kind of lifestyle one aspires to and strives to participate in.

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48. D. Bartlett, 'In Russia, at Last and Forever: The First Seven Years of Russian Vogue', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 10, nos 1–2 (2006): 175–203; Elena Karpova, Nancy Nelson-Hodges and William Tullar, 'Making Sense of the Market: An Exploration of Apparel Consumption Practices of the Russian Consumer', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 11, no. 1 (2007): 106–21, also report that the origin of clothing tends to be more important than the label.

In engaging in these practices, students explicitly address their lifestyle as European and not western. A western lifestyle is understood rather pejoratively and tends to be associated with the untrammelled influx of western media and products, with wholesale westernization.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, the European signifier signals a more open, two-way relationship between Russianness and Europeaness in which embracing Europeaness does not automatically imply surrendering Russianness. Identifying with Europe in this sense does not mean becoming European by uncritically taking over what are considered to be European attributes – by imitating Europe – or by wanting to leave Russia for Europe. Rather, there is a selective engagement with these attributes, which are then partly adapted and partly rejected in a kind of pick-and-mix attitude. Here the European signifier is rather used as a marker of positive distinction from ‘ordinary’ Russianness. The following section will try to clarify to what degree this European identity is reflected in the imagining of Europe vis-a-vis Russia by the instructors and students at MGIMO.

## Studying Europe

We shall now change the context of analysis and move to material that was created in what I have termed ‘studying Europe’. The term ‘studying’ has been chosen to underscore the fact that articulations of Europe in this context are created in a more formalized process of conscious reflection on Russia’s role and place in the world and its relationship to Europe. Among other things, I directly asked students whether they regarded Russia as a European country. Accompanying this change of context is a change in the dominant form of signification from social practice to verbal representations.

### *Europe as an Unattainable Ideal*

Many students reference Europe as a possible role model and positive ideal for Russia. The attainment of European values enjoys a positive connotation and would grant Russia recognition by other European states and thus access to the ranks of established and respected states. Vladimir, a fourth year student, is convinced that Russia is a part of Europe and addresses quite explicitly the role of identity:

I think that there is no doubt about Russia’s final European choice, because it is only as a member of the ‘Big Europe’ that Russia can realize its identity. (#3)<sup>50</sup>

49. For similar observations see Hilary A. Pilkington, ‘Looking West? Cultural Globalisation and Russian Youth Cultures’, *Europæa* 6, nos 1/2 (2001): 83–98.

50. Numbers are used as tags to assign interview extracts to interviews.

He speaks about how Russia's historical role in Europe has intertwined Europe and Russia:

Historically, Russia has always played a very important, sometimes even a leading role in the current affairs of Europe. (#3)

Similarity and equivalence between Europe and Russia are especially expressed when talking about cultural or historical qualities. Even where the closeness of European civilization to Russian civilization is emphasized, however, this articulation is characterized by a fundamental split between ideal and reality. For Sasha, a second year student of international journalism, European 'values' are set as an ideal which Russia shares with Europe but which it has not yet embraced:

I would like to believe that Russia is European. But for the time being, Russia is far from it. I think that we still have to struggle a lot. This is still far and not as easy as it might appear at first glance. Although Russia is on the right way. If there aren't any serious disruptions, we will make it. (#6)

Boris, a third year student of IR, claims that:

Russia and Europe have values in common. I think that Russia is a European country. Although people's mentality is already different. (#14)

Masha, who is in the fourth year of her IR studies, puts this more directly:

Many take offence when Russia is not called a European country. But, unfortunately, you have got to be honest, go out on the streets and just get on a bus. (#23)

Europe is interpreted more as an abstract ideal or leitmotif rather than as something that would have everyday relevance for the ordinary Russian. For students life 'out on the streets' in the 'real Russia' is distinct from life at MGIMO. Russia as a whole still has to 'struggle a lot' to become European, while at MGIMO the kind of Europeanness that forms an almost unattainable ideal for the rest of Russia can be lived out.

### *Exclusion from and by a Superior Europe*

But it is not only Russia which fails to institute European values and therefore to become more European. Lilya, a third year student of political science, recounts how:

very often Russia acts as a scapegoat...because Russia's prestige, its image in the eyes of other countries...only very slowly improves. All my friends who went to Europe, they say that Russia is perceived as a monster there. Such negative dispositions! And at all the conferences which were specially organized for the joint work of both Russians and Europeans on some common problems, Russia serves as an example of all anti-democratic [vices] and all evils that you can think of in this world. (#29)

For Anatoliy, a fourth year student of IR, this European arrogance also becomes evident in the European Union's political actions and the disregard it shows for Russian concerns:

[The Baltic states] basically block our way into Kaliningrad Oblast', to our enclave, to our territory. And the very fact that they, for example, simply kicked our citizens out of the trains if they did not have the right visas when crossing the border, this, in my opinion, does not have a positive effect, especially on the relations with the Baltic states...but also with the EU at large. (#16)

Europe is seen to have missed the chance of establishing closer ties with Russia as it expanded eastwards. Instead, it bullies Russia and tries to contain its influence. One lecturer voices suspicions that Europe really does not want Russia to become a part of Europe:

Russia is either not needed there [in the EU and NATO] or it cannot be there, this is not quite clear. Is it either not needed for the efficient functioning of these organizations or can it not be there simply by definition, because these organizations have been established for countering Russian influence? (Lectures 2005)

Russia is excluded from Europe by a kind of Europe that acts as superior to Russia and behaves in a dismissive and condescending fashion towards it, showing little respect for Russia's own cultural sovereignty. Students perceive a high degree of arbitrariness in the definition of where Europe begins and where it ends. Europe's borders shift at the discretion of Europe itself and those who stand outside them have to adopt a submissive position if they ever want to become European. The label 'Europe' is misused as a political vehicle of consecration, rewarding those who fulfil the 'requirements' of Europeanness, set out by self-styled European states, and thereby surrender their sovereignty. As a title of honour, 'Europe' is only bestowed upon those who submit to European hegemony.

### *Placing Europe at a Distance*

Given this perceived exclusionary stance towards Russia, one lecturer stresses that there are attractive alternatives to Europe:

They [the EU and NATO] simply do not take notice of CSTO.<sup>51</sup> They generally do not want to pronounce 'Community [sic] of Independent States', they prefer 'Newly Independent States', because Newly Independent States can build their relations on a bilateral base. And when there is a community, this means that besides your European Union there are still other unions...

Who knew anything about CSTO before 1999? Nobody knew anything except that it somewhere somehow exists! And suddenly, after 1999, the

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51. Collective Security Treaty Organization, the CIS equivalent to NATO in which Russia plays a leading role.

rebirth of CSTO sets in...And by now CSTO is even so bold as to ask for direct relations between CSTO and NATO, CSTO and the European Union... You've got to understand: there is a certain competition. Who wins over whom? (*Kto kogo?*) (Lectures 2006)

Similarly, in the interviews students at MGIMO foreground both Russia's self-sufficiency and the manifold ways Europe depends on Russia and not vice versa. With Europe tangled up in a host of paralysing internal problems that consume its capacity to act, it needs a strong Russia to jointly solve external challenges and create a centre of power. Galya, a fourth year student of international journalism, describes Russia's central role in European security:

We try to capitalize on the strong sides of our country, i.e. fossil fuels and the role that Russia plays in Europe, because European security is impossible without Russia, it would collapse... And then energy security... Europe actually needs us. (#2)

Many students invoked territorial arguments to underscore the separateness of Europe and Russia when I asked them about the prospects for the integration of Russia into Europe. The sheer size of Russia's territory is considered to be a barrier to rapprochement with Europe. Andrey, a fourth year student studying IR, puts this bluntly:

Integration into the European space is a somewhat strange factor for us. Strange, because Russia is a very big state and several Europes would fit on our territory. About five, probably. (#10)

Stressing Russia's uniqueness serves as a means of dissociation from Europe. Anastasiya, a third year student of IR, regards Russia's cultural roots as separate from those of Europe and, while acknowledging European influences, sketches a picture of Russian cultural uniqueness:

I guess Russia is a separate civilization, as Gumilev said, which unites elements of the East and the West, i.e. Asian elements and European elements. (#35)

In an introductory lecture one professor earned student cheers for his fervent plea that Russia did not have to look to join others but, owing to its peculiarities and distinctiveness, should boldly go its own way. Imagining Russia as a distinct cultural and territorial entity in this way links up with the proposition that alternatives exist to institutional integration into Europe: to place Europe at a distance from Russia. There is no perceived need either to align Russia with Europe, and thus to directly identify with Europe, or to position Europe in conscious opposition to Russia. In fact, reference to the signifier 'Europe' all but disappears in Katya's (fourth year, IR) rendering of Europe's relevance for Russia:

I think that Russia is Russia. There exists an opinion that Russia is not East and not West, that Russia is what it is. This is indeed so... We have always gone our own way and, probably, we will continue to go it, of

course sometimes leaning more on the European side in some issues. But in principle we have our own way of development. (#9)

The assertion of Russia's independence and strength in these accounts can be read as a response to the perceived exclusion from Europe. Europe can no longer relegate Russia to the role of a passive object. Instead, with the reassertion of Russia vis-a-vis Europe students see an emancipation from Europe. Europe is left behind as the yardstick against which to measure Russian identity. In this self-confident outlook Europe is considered neither as a role model in the positive sense nor as an antagonist or hostile other. What happens is a de-articulation of Europe in the sense that it does not function as an empty signifier around which identity is constructed. Europe is placed at a distance from Russia but not in opposition to it.

### Situating Europe: Differing Symbolic Shapes

At MGIMO Europe does not have a fixed shape; instead of a facile hegemony of one particular articulation of Europe over others, what we find are rather shifting articulations of and identifications with Europe. In the busyness of everyday life Europe and Europeanness are lived out by engaging in an essentially European lifestyle. A sense of identity is instilled by taking part in the same practices – practices which also create a feeling of distinctiveness vis-a-vis the ordinary Russia, the world outside of MGIMO. These everyday practices unite students who otherwise have very different geopolitical views. In the process I have called 'studying Europe' the geopolitical articulation of Europe acquires prominence over its articulation in the students' everyday life-world. The more reflexive engagement with Europe against the wider background of its relationship to Russia in world politics engenders completely different identifications, in which Europe tends to be placed at a distance from Russia and the idea of Russia as a part of Europe garners only limited support. Within this geopolitical frame of reference, very few students would consider themselves European.

This shifting of identification with Europe at MGIMO echoes Mouffe's conceptualization of identity as always contingent and overdetermined and dependent on specific forms of identification.<sup>52</sup> As discursive subjects, students at MGIMO are not positioned by one hegemonic discourse but rather by different discourses, and their articulations of Europe in different contexts. The different shapes of Europe are therefore not contradictory or mutually exclusive. The same person can happily embrace the opportunities offered by the greater Europeanization of education in Russia, for example, while still advocating that Russia emancipate itself from Europe in its foreign policy.<sup>53</sup>

52. Mouffe, 'Citizenship and Identity'.

53. These overlapping identities have also been briefly addressed in focus group research on the views and perception of Europe by ordinary Russians in

The differing symbolic shapes of Europe in the special setting of MGIMO as an educational institution should therefore be interpreted against the multiple contexts of their articulation. Studying Europe at MGIMO is predicated to a significant degree on teaching the European Union within a formal, geopolitical context. The meaning of Europe intersects with the meaning attached to the EU as the politico-economic image of Europe and its relationship to Russia.<sup>54</sup> Official articulations specific to the European Union as a political and economic actor therefore come to gain significant weight in the overall articulation of Europe. This applies especially to the articulation of exclusion, which is more explicitly linked to the European Union and thus the foreign policy dimension than to the idea of Europe. This 'Europe as EU' appears in articulations at MGIMO which recur in the formal teaching of International Relations and which, in turn, actualize formal foreign policy knowledge. In this context, subjects are positioned by foreign policy discourses originating at the societal level and their local expressions within MGIMO.

On the other hand, there is a meaning of Europe which students enact almost naturally as part of their everyday lives and which is far removed from official foreign policy discourses. This meaning is articulated in the context of the mundane practices of students as they go about their daily lives: travelling, reading newspapers, looking for jobs. The lived European experience at MGIMO ties in with suggestions by other authors that Russian elites show an affinity specifically to Europe in their everyday lives.<sup>55</sup> However, at MGIMO this clearly does not happen in the sense of a wholesale takeover of European attributes and a European lifestyle but rather in the sense of an adaptation enacting a self-conscious Russian Europeanness. The fact that these practices appear so natural and self-evident does not mean that they are somehow non-discursive or pre-discursive; instead they might be usefully thought of as a sedimented discourse which has become naturalized to a degree that its contingency is no longer obvious.<sup>56</sup>

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Stephen White, Ian McAllister and Margot Light, 'Enlargement and the New Outsiders', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 1 (2002): 135–53, 146–7. Results indicate ambiguous identities and a considerable breadth of meaning attached to the idea of 'Europeaness'. While many respondents felt attracted to European civilization and culture, they were considerably less vociferous advocates of political integration with Europe. A majority considered Russia a unique country in geopolitical terms, for which it was not desirable to strive for the status of a European state.

54. On this see also Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU*, 183–4.

55. Gvosdev, 'Russia: European but not Western'; Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, 174ff.

56. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn', 636–7. Sedimented discourses have also been called 'institutionalised performativity'; for more detail see Kate Nash, 'Thinking Political Sociology: Beyond the Limits of Post-Marxism', *History of the Human Sciences* 15, no. 4 (2002): 97–114.



Highlighting the contingent articulation of Europe in different contexts shows that it is inadequate to extrapolate from the identification with Europe found in everyday life to identification with Europe in the assessment of international politics and a pro-European policy orientation. The opposite is also true: the endorsement of a Eurasianist, non-European position in foreign policy does not predict a similar stance in everyday life. Thinking of articulations of Europe as situated may offer some explanation as to how Russians can engage in European everyday practices and reaffirm their cultural affinity to European civilization<sup>57</sup> and yet pursue foreign policy actions that can be considered a turn away from Europe.<sup>58</sup> This is not a contradiction, and nor is it the result of some kind of 'new' Russian identity that has won over an old one. It is rather the result of situated identities which are called up in different contexts. Thinking in this way about Russia's relationship with Europe not only foregrounds the breadth of meaning attached to Europe; it also helps to conceptualize the apparent change in identities not as a replacement or superposition of identities but as the situated positioning of subjects in the various discourses that fix the meaning of Europe.

On a more practical note, what are the implications for Russian foreign policy that could be drawn from the identities I have charted in the micro-setting of MGIMO? As the future elites in power, the students currently being educated at MGIMO seem likely to favour a continuation of the assertive foreign policy that has become characteristic of the Russian administration in recent years. Growing up in a rising Russia, at MGIMO they are instilled with national self-confidence and a sense of Russian distinctiveness in the world. Although this post-Soviet generation has been more exposed to western media, culture and lifestyles than any generation before it and more than most of its age cohort, it would be unwarranted to expect a distinctly pro-western or pro-European stance in foreign policy. While many students nurture an everyday life affinity to a European lifestyle, they still largely advocate a policy line of national strength and independence from Europe. One should therefore be careful about assuming that the younger generation of Russians educated at MGIMO will have a more European outlook in the future than the current elite has today.<sup>59</sup> It is important

57. As observed in Ted Hopf, 'Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia', *Review of International Studies* 31 (2005): 225–43.

58. As observed in Mankoff, 'Russia and the West', and in Dmitriy Trenin, 'Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West', *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2007): 95–105.

59. On the basis of the data provided by the New Russia Barometer, a regular survey of the Russian population, this hypothesis is suggested for the popular geopolitical orientation in Russia in Richard Rose and Neil Munro, 'Do Russians See Their Future in Europe or the CIS?', *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 1 (2008): 49–66, 63.

to realize, however, that students' future socialization is also bound to have a formative impact on their identities. Those who aspire to a diplomatic career will have to undergo further training in the Diplomatic Academy and the Russian Foreign Ministry, which will subject them to new institutional ideologies.

## Conclusion: Why Situate Identities in IR?

Identities are produced in different contexts through different forms of signification – they are situated. An attentiveness to this situatedness makes us aware of the multiplicity of subject positions and their shifting nature. Identities are no longer to be regarded as all-encompassing, fixed attributes that can be attached to different social groups and that are pitted against each other. Taking the situatedness of identities seriously forces us to recognize that identities shift and that the same subjects can have different identities, that they are positioned situationally by different discourses. It also calls for greater attention to be given to sites of identity production beyond the immediate confines of foreign policy and forms of signification beyond the reflexive production of texts.

In the analysis of international politics, identities are frequently cited in attempts to explain competing elite attitudes or foreign policy. Identities are treated as universal features of social groups or states from which certain behaviour can be deduced. In the analysis of Russian foreign policy, for example, competing discourses of identity like those of Slavophiles versus Westernizers are often seen to be at the heart of understanding Russian international relations.<sup>60</sup> Instead of helping us to better understand the contingency and shifting nature of identities, such divisions into different camps reify identities as essential and stable attributes of unified subjects. They stress the universality of identities and skirt over their particularity. Situating the processes of identification in their multiple contexts and forms of signification disrupts such homogenization and universalization and works towards the realization of a more complex picture of identities which is better able to account for the ambiguities of identity formation.

The contextualization of identity production, 'the specific forms of identification',<sup>61</sup> deserve particular attention in situating identities. Within micro-settings, such as the elite university I have described in this article,

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60. For example in Rose and Munro, 'Do Russians See Their Future in Europe or the CIS?'; Andrei P. Tsygankov, 'Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-up', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36 (2003): 101–27; William Zimmerman, 'Slavophiles and Westernizers Redux: Contemporary Russian Elite Perspectives', *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2005): 183–209.

61. Mouffe, 'Citizenship and Identity', 28.

the seemingly clear-cut, unambiguous boundaries between identities, frequently proposed in studies at the national level, become blurred as people and their life-worlds are incorporated into the analysis. This focus on the local, on specific contexts, may seem counter-intuitive for a discipline like IR, which has generally been more inclined to adopt a perspective of 'overview'. However, if we speak of identities as attributes of states, we neglect the fact that the state is actually made up of individual subjects and their identities. Only if we understand the subjectivities of international politics, can we hope to gain a better purchase on identity construction at the level of the state.

On a more conceptual note, foregrounding the situatedness of identities constitutes an overdue move towards putting a more complex concept of identity into practice. For one thing, it tries to do justice to the demands made by constructivists to recognize the importance of the social setting in the construction of identities. For another, it addresses the contingency and shifting nature of identities – a central element of poststructuralist thought. In this article, a reconsideration of the concept of discourse and the discursive constitution of identities has been proposed as useful for theoretically reframing identities as situated. In so doing, I hope to have sketched a conceptual avenue which could lead to a broader engagement with varied processes of identification and reduce the analytical distance which still characterizes the majority of research on identities in IR.

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